President Says He Foresees No Impeachment

Rationing Of Gasoline Unlikely

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Associated Press

President Nixon said last night, "I do not expect to be impeached."

The President said in speaking of the energy situation that, as a result of the cooperation of the American people, "while the crisis has passed, the problem still remains and it is a very serious one."

At a nationally broadcast news conference, Mr. Nixon also said "there is a much better than even chance" that the United States can weather the energy crisis without gasoline rationing.

Watergate and its offshoots, and energy — specifically the gasoline problem — were dominant topics at his first White House question-and-answer session since Oct. 26. On Nov. 17 he held an hour-long question-and-answer session with members of The Associated Press Managing Editors Association at the group's convention at Disney World in Florida.

By White House count, Mr. Nixon has held 37 sessions with the press since taking office more than five years ago. These include briefings for editors and other briefings in addition to nationally broadcast news conferences.

The President disclosed that Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski asked him to testify before a federal grand jury, and said he declined to do so on constituional grounds.

Mr. Nixon said he offered to meet Jaworski personally and answer questions, but the prosecutor did not wish to proceed in that way.

He dealt head-on with impeachment when asked whether a full-scale impeachment trial in the Senate would not permit him to clear the air and settle Watergate issues once and for all.

"A full impeachment trial in the Senate comes only . . . when the House determines that there is an impeachable offense," Mr. Nixon said.

He said he does not believe the House will reach that conclusion.

"I do not expect to be impeached," the President said. The House Judiciary Committee now is conducting a preliminary impeachment inquiry.

Mr. Nixon challenged one of the major conclusions of an initial study by the committee staff, saying that in the opinion of White House lawyers, "a criminal offense on the part of the President is a requirement for impeachment."

The staff study held that it is not necessary to prove criminal conduct in order to impeach a President.

Mr. Nixon repeated his conditional offer to cooperate with the House impeachment inquiry. He noted that talks are under way between his lawyers and the Judiciary Committee.

As he did in his State of the Union message, Mr. Nixon said this cooperation would not extend to any action that would undercut the prerogatives of the presidency.

Mr. Nixon added that hi

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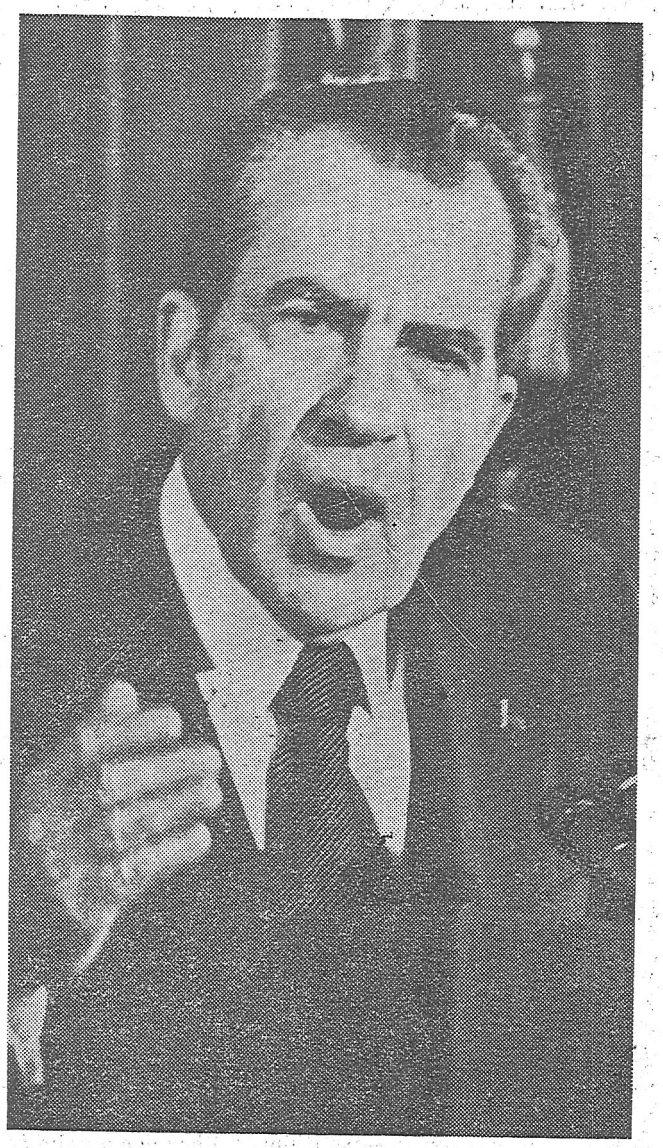

Associated Press

Nixon: "A criminal offense . . . is a requirement."

No Impeachment Expected by Nixon

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attorney, James D. St. Clair, now is negotiating with committee counsel John Doar. "Whatever eventually is arranged which will win prompt resolution of this matter I will cooperate with," he said.

But, responding to another question, he cited other guidelines: the arrangements must protect the confidentiality of White House documents, must not jeopardize the rights of any defendants and must not impair the prosecution.

In discussing the energy crisis, the President said he would veto emergency legislation if it passes Congress in its present form, with a provision designed to force a rollback of the price of domestic petroleum.

Mr. Nixon said the rollback provision would discourage domestic production, and he said that step could lead to longer gasoline lines and thus to a need for rationing.

While Mr. Nixon said the immediate petroleum crisis has passed, he added repeatedly that the problem remains.

". . . I now believe confidently that there is much better than an even chance there will be no need for gas rationing in the United States," the President said.

Mr. Nixon said that in October, after the Arab oil embargo, there were predictions that some heating oil would be short, and that industry would not have enough fuel.

He said those problems have not materialized, that ". . . we have now passed through the crisis."

But Mr. Nixon acknowledged that gasoline remains a serious problem.

"I have seen this problem as I have driven around in the Miami area, and also in the Washington area," he said. "The gas lines, the fact, too, that in the Eastern states generally we do have a problem of shortages of gasoline."

Mr. Nixon noted that Federal Enregy Office chief William E. Simon already has acted to allocate more gasoline for hard-hit areas. He said Simon is prepared to take further action along those lines if necessary.

The energy legislation now before the House would empower the President to order gasoline rationing, and authorize other stringent conservation measures, subject to congressional veto.

But Mr. Nixon said he would veto that bill because of its proposed price rollback. The President said that price action would deter domestic production, force rationing and a vast bureaucracy to implement it, and set back the effort to make the United States self-sufficient in energy.

Prior to the news conference, deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said in response to questions that "the President has not laid down any prohibition on questions."

But Warren and other White House officials consistently have refused to discuss a key element of the Watergate controversy—questions surrounding White House tape recordings of Mr. Nixon's Watergate-related conversations. They cited an order by U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica forbidding principals in the controversy from publicly discussing the issue.